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THE MANY FACES OF THE

FILIPINO

FIGHTING ARTS

By Kasey Chong

The Philippines, an island nation, was vulnerable to countless invasions by other countries. This violent history resulted in constant revision and realignment of the native Filipino fighting system. Although the Indonesians, Malaysians and Chinese played a partial role in shaping the indigenous Filipino martial arts, it was the Spanish who occupied the Philippines for over three hundred years that had the greatest influence on the Filipino martial art of Eskrima.

During the Spanish occupation of the Philippines, the Spanish banned the art because they believed it was too violent and more importantly because they wanted to suppress the aggressive opposition to their rule. Despite the native martial arts being outlawed, they were preserved in the form of dance rituals.

The forms practised today stem from these dance rituals which were designed to disguise the

lethal techniques of the martial art from the watchful eyes of the Spanish leaders. Set to native music and performed without weapons, the movements appeared completely harmless. These dances, which were first created in defiance to Spanish authority, become popular and were performed for the Spaniards' enjoyment at public functions.

Despite this bitter irony, the Spanish influence on the Filipino martial arts resulted

in the unique blend of long and short weapons derived from the Spanish rapier and dagger systems. Regarded as the highest level of weaponry training, the incorporation of one long and one short weapon, namely the sword (or stick) and the dagger (known as espada y daga), is one of the distinguishing features of the Filipino martial arts. The sword slashes, thrusts, breaks, cuts and slices at long range. The dagger, which inflicts similar damage, is also used to monitor the opponent's limbs, lock and disarm the opponent at close range.

Doce Pares Eskrima instructor and founder of the Australian Integrated Martial Arts Academy, Robert Halajjian, says: "Espada y daga is considered to be advanced as it teaches you to deal with two weapons of very different nature.

The sword is long, powerful and hacks. The dagger is short, subtle and cuts. Both are equally unforgiving but the strategies related to dealing with both of these weapons are very different. What will work for the sword will not work for the dagger and vice versa. That forces you to concentrate not only on the type of weapon, but also the nature of the weapon."

Filipino Kali instructor, Mick Nicholls, who teaches Urban Blade seminars on realistic knife defence says: "Most people who teach knife defence deal purely with the knife.

They make the mistake of ignoring the fact that the person has two legs and another free arm to attack you with. Just because you have a knife

in one hand doesn't mean that the rest of the body has died off. The Filipinos will kick and punch as well as use the blade. Training with two weapons, as in espada y





1. Steve and Kacey are in the classical guard position.



2. As Steve strikes Kacey, she jams the attack with her stick and cuts his hand with her dagger (or kris) simultaneously.



3. Kacey strikes low to the knee with her stick while continuing to monitor his weapon with her dagger.



4. She brings her stick up to thrust at Steve's throat before she disarms him.



5. Kacey twists the stick out of Steve's hand to disarm him.



6. Steve thrusts with his dagger. Kacey parries his attack with her dagger and strikes back simultaneously.



7. She finishes with a thrust to the mid-section.

daga, makes you more aware of the other weapons the opponent has, that the other limbs can still do damage."

The Indomitable Mentality

The spirit of the natives of the Philippines is embodied in their unconquerable approach to life. The Philippines was a very blade-oriented society, with much of the population relying on farming as their livelihood. This bladed culture is distinctively reflected in the Filipino martial arts, consequently earning the Filipinos a world-renowned status as experts in bladed weaponry.

After years of experience in combat with heavily armoured soldiers, the Filipinos adapted their arts to overcome these soldiers with nerve strikes to gaps in the armour. These openings were usually located at the throat and joints, such as the elbow, knee and hip. A different mentality evolved from this encounter with tough armour, an indomitable mentality that possessed the Eskrimador to counter a single attack with savage multiple attacks to ensure the opponent went down and stayed down... for good.

Experts in Weaponry and Empty Hand Combat

Visualise the Filipino martial arts and you are likely to imagine fire-hardened rattan sticks with their distinctive burn marks,

slashing through the air. Or perhaps flying sparks from the clashing of machetes. Knives, daggers and other exotic weapons, such as the wavy double-edged kris and the dual-handled butterfly (balisong) may also flash across your mind.

The last thing to come to mind would be the refined empty-hand combat system derived from the centuries of survival knife fighting. Better known for their expertise in bladed weaponry, the empty-hand combat system of the Filipino martial arts is often overlooked.

Filipino kickboxing incorporates the Filipino arts of Panantukan (boxing) and Pananjakman (kicking), and embraces the use of open-handed and closed-fist strikes, devastating knee and elbow techniques, and close quarter trapping and grappling skills.

Filipino Boxing

While Filipino boxing (Panantukan) bears some resemblance to Western boxing, it is not bound by the rules of Western boxing. Many open-handed strikes, such as the palm-heel strike, closed-fist strikes, such as the hammerfist, elbow strikes and head butts are utilised. Targets are not limited to the head and upper body, as the upper and lower limbs and the groin are also attacked.

Filipino Kicking

Low line kicking is characteristic of Filipino kicking (Pananjakman), the main purpose being to temporarily immobilise or stun the attacker. While powerful kicks are utilised, Filipino kicks are not necessarily executed with the principle of 'killing with one blow' in mind. Aimed at the right targets, such as the knee or the sciatic nerve in the thigh, they can inflict as much damage to the joints, ligaments, muscles and nerves, and maim the attacker, in anticipation of following up with multiple counter-attacks before ending with a finishing blow.

Low line kicking is advantageous in self defence situations where restrictive clothing and an obstructive surrounding environment do not favour high kicks. Unlike high kicks aimed above the waist, low kicks rarely demand a warm-up and are less likely to be detected and caught.

By destroying the legs, the base on which the rest of the body weight is supported is also destroyed. With low line kicks attacking the legs, it becomes increasingly difficult for the opponent to remain mobile enough to continue a strong attack with injured legs.

Trapping and Grappling

Acknowledging close range as the most common street fighting distance, the Filipino



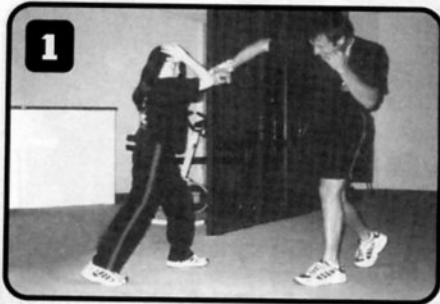
1. Vlado and Kacey square off into a guard position.



2. From kicking range, Vlado throws a rear round house kick to the thigh. Kacey jams his kick and simultaneously throws a finger-jab to Vlado's eye.



3. She follows with a round kick to the thigh, monitoring Vlado's lead hand at the same time.



4. Vlado returns a cross from boxing range. Kacey parries, guiding the cross, meeting and destroying it with an elbow.



5. She moves into trapping range before throwing a hammer fist into Vlado's neck, which he is able to check.



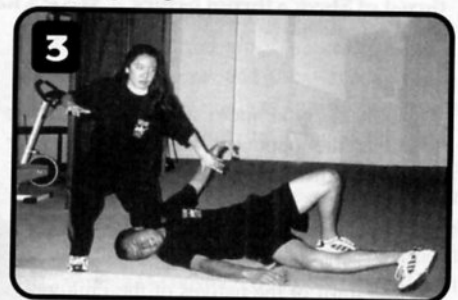
6. She traps his checking hand and strikes his neck, bringing him into grappling range.



7. She secures his neck and lends a head-butt to his face.



8. Kacey performs a circular takedown, controlling the rest of the body by controlling his head.



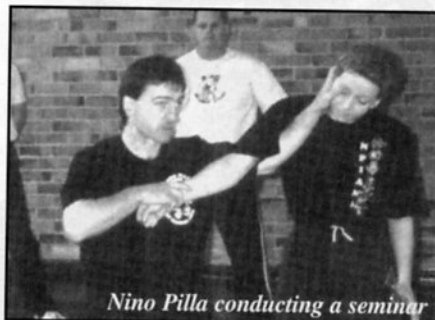
9. Kacey finishes with a knee to Vlado's head.

martial arts caters for this with trapping techniques and disciplines such as Dumog (Filipino wrestling) and Eskrido (a combination of Eskrima and Judo). Filipino trapping, at first glance, will be familiar to Wing Chun practitioners. The trapping, however, is not used only in the empty-hand context, but also deals with the various weapons used in the Filipino martial arts.

Controlling and manipulating the opponent with the advanced skills of joint-locking and ground grappling resembling Shootwrestling and Ju-Jitsu, the Eskrimador is equipped with the knowledge and proficiency to deal with all the five ranges of combat: kicking, boxing, trapping, upright (stand up) and ground grappling and, of course, weaponry.

The Concept of Flow

The mentality of the Filipino martial arts is such that the Eskrimador is able to flow from



Nino Pilla conducting a seminar

one range to another when necessary. The practised Eskrimador will move from long range, or kicking range, into boxing range and if necessary, into trapping range with ease. Although grappling is not a first choice, as it is with grappling styles such as Ju-Jitsu, the Eskrimador is equipped to move from trapping range into grappling range if the need arises and will grapple competently, whether upright or on the ground.

Unlike many martial arts that 'end the fight' at boxing range or trapping range, the

Filipino martial arts recognises that there are situations in which ending at boxing or trapping range is not an option. This is evident in the characteristic ability of Eskrimadors to adapt to given circumstances and flow continuously from long range to close range and back out to long range again, as the situation dictates.

Nino Pilla, Filipino Kali instructor and founder of the Nino Pilla International Academy of Martial Arts says: "In any combat situation, the range can change dramatically depending on your surroundings or the number of opponents you might have. The range will be dictated either by your opponent, by yourself, or by the circumstances, so it becomes very important to have the ability to change your range and adapt yourself to the situation in order to survive."

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